105

Identification

The Lilse (Lyela) are a tribe of 39, 000 (in 1950) belonging to the Grunshi group of the Mossi-Grunshi branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic stock. With them are tentatively grouped the Nioniosse (Nyonyose).

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, with millet (Pennisetum spicatum) and sorghum (Andopogon sorghum) as the staples. Other important crops are maize, peanuts, beans, earth peas (Voandzeia subterranea), sesame, and cotton (Gossypium punctatum). Lesser crops include squash, "oseille" (Hibiscus sabdariffa), okra (Abelmoschus esculentus), tomatoes, peppers (Capsicum frutescens), and "chanvre" (Hibiscus cannabinus.) Almost no root crops are grown. Livestock, which are not numerous, include the following, in decreasing order of importance: goats, sheep, dogs, donkeys, horses, and cattle. (The foregoing data also apply to the Mossi of Yatenga). Horses are few, and there are some donkeys and many chickens. There is practically no trade.

Social Stratification

The Lilse supply smiths to the Mossi.

Marriage

A groom makes gifts to the bride's relatives, but there is no bride-price.

Family

There are non-residential extended families (perhaps really lineages) with heads.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

There are named "clans", and possibly lineages, presumably patrilineal. Tauxier says that few people know the clan to which they belong.

Kinship Terminology

Fa--mesa. Mo--miyin. Br, FaSo--m'iabi. Br, MoSo--m'sabi. Si--niondo. ElSi--nieboro. YoSi--nindikian. So--borobi. Hu--dibara. Wi--pongokiom.

FaBr--misabi. MoBr--bana. Father-in-law--mone. Mother-in-law--menekion. Son-in-law--mene.

Cousin or relative--bi.

105

Settlement Pattern

Dwellings are round, with thatched roofs.

Community Organization

Villages are divided into quarters. Many of the villages are reported to include only a single "family" (lineage?), where others have as many as 14.

Local Government

There are village headmen.

State

District chiefs are reported, but there was no higher political integration prior to the advent of Mossi rule.

Bibliography

Lavergne de Tressan, M. de. Inventaire linguistique de l'Afrique Occidentale Française et du Togo. Mémoires de l'Institute Français d'Afrique Noire, XXX, 1-241. 1953.

Tauxier, L. Le noir du Yatenga. Paris, 1917. (Has a modest amount of information).

Identification

The Mossi (Mole, Moshi) are a culturally homogeneous nation belonging to the Mossi-Grunshi branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic stock. Mangin and Tauxier report that they number about 1, 500, 000, of whom over 1, 000, 000 live in the central Mossi kingdom; this figure is exclusive of a considerable number of Yarse, Fulani, and subjugated natives of alien stock. De Martonne (1921) reports the Mossi of the Haute Volta as numbering 1, 950, 000, but he possibly includes the Gurma. Tauxier believes that the population is a fusion of Mossi conquerors from the NE and aboriginal peoples akin to the Dogon, Kipirsi, Grunshi, and Bussanse. Their state is old. Apparently founded in the 12th century, it was strong enough to conquer Timbuctoo in the 14th century. Political unification and internal peace have promoted a dense population of 65 per square mile (based on the total figure of 1, 500, 000). Until the French occupation the open practice of Islam was forbidden, but since then it has made appreciable inroads on paganism. Delafosse (1912) reports a population of 1, 262, 000 Mossi exclusive of 147, 000 Gurma. Urvoy (1942) reports a total population of 1, 360, 000, of whom only about 90, 000 are Moslem, these being the Yarse. Lavergne de Tressan (1953) reports 1, 680, 000 Mossi in 1950, plus 72, 000 Yarse.

Basic Economy

Primarily agricultural, with brand-tillage and hoe cultivation. The staple crop is millet (Pennisetum spicatum), followed by sorghum and then maize. Also grown are sesame, peanuts, earth peas, "karyanga" (a forage grain), okra, roselle, tomatoes, "native eggplant", peppers, squash, gourds, cucumbers, "yergan" (Cucumeropsis?), Coleus coffini, cotton, and ambary, as well as small quantities of taro (Galadium antiquorum), yams (very few), sweet potatoes, rice, sweet sorghum, earth peas, beans, and cow peas. Onions are not grown, nor is manioc (Tauxier; but Mangin reports it).

Cattle are kept in considerable number, but mainly by Yarse and Fulani rather than Mossi. The Mossi, however, keep numerous sheep, goats, donkeys, horses, dogs (eaten), chickens, guinea fowl, and bees, to which list Mangin adds some cats, ducks, and pigeons. Hunting is fairly important, fishing less so; both are pastimes, and there are also professional hunters. Gathering, especially of the fruits of Butyrospermum parkii (karite) and Parkia afrikana (nere), is as important as hunting (the same products are also reported for the Grunshi tribes).

Trade is likewise important. Internal trade is conducted at regular markets, of which there is one in each village. External trade is mainly in the hands of the Yarse (and a few Haussa), who import salt and livestock from the N and kola nuts and slaves from the S.

Sex Division of Labor

Men and boys tend goats, sheep, and fowls (the Fulani tend cattle and horses). Women gather. Men hunt and clear land for agriculture. Both sexes participate almost equally in other agricultural work, though the men do more hoeing.

Property

Cowries are used as currency. Uncleared land belongs to the village, and the headman's permission must usually be secured before clearing a new plot. Land is owned in theory by the king, and its control is vested in district chiefs. Tilled land is held by individuals, not collectively. Each householder usually has one large bush field and a smaller garden near his compound.

Inheritance is patrilineal--by ElSo, who takes his father's compound (leaving his own to an unmarried YoBr who inherits a widow of Fa) and farm land (giving some to younger brothers if more than he can work), and about half of the livestock, slaves, and money (distributing the rest among his younger brothers and even his sisters). In the restricted regions where there are functional extended families, family property is inherited by YoBr, then ElSo inheriting the private property. If a man leaves no sons, Mangin reports that the ElDa inherits, then the youngest son, but Tauxier reports that the next younger brother inherits the compound and fields and shares the livestock, money and slaves with the daughters. In default of children and younger brothers (an ElBr does not inherit), the primary heir is the eldest fraternal nephew.

Social Stratification

Slavery is well developed. Slaves are obtained by capture in war, by purchase, and by birth into slave status. A slave who marries a daughter of his master becomes free, and his children are free. Smiths form an isolated (and inferentially endogamous caste), occupying a separate quarter in each village. Fulani herders also live in separate small settlements outside the village. Yarse traders form a privileged class, below the nobility but above the commoners, and occupy special quarters in the villages where they live. The sons of chiefs form a privileged aristocracy; they inhabit special villages, often pillage caravans, and are permitted to exact gifts from

commoners without recourse. At the top of the social pyramid is the royalty. The sons of kings are not allowed to live in the capital but are set up with special small courts in provincial villages. The daughters of kings enjoy a very high status; they dominate their husbands and often lead profligate lives.

Marriage

Normally a father choses a girl for his young son, makes periodic gifts to her family, and when she reaches puberty pays a bride-price, consisting on the average of 25, 000 cowries plus cloth, salt, and koka nuts. Where there are functional extended families, the head arranges for the marriage of young girls, sometimes by an exchange of women, sometimes with a bride-price, and sometimes without; in the last case, the bride-price for the ElDa of the union goes to the family head or his heir.

General polygyny prevails, exclusively in the non-sororal form. The first wife is chief wife, but each co-wife with her children occupies a separate hut. Secondary unions are preferred with FaWi, allowed with WiSi (but only after death of Wi) and BrWi (inferentially only ElBrWi).

Family

The normal residential unit is a polygynous family occupying a compound; it includes the wives and unmarried children of the male head, slaves, and oftentimes unmarried brothers of the head. There are also remnants of a patrilocal extended family organization in some regions, but not as a residential unit; where such an organization occurs, the head is succeeded by his YoBr, then his ElSo.

Residence

Residence is normally patrilocal. Older boys and unmarried men live in a separate hut in the compound of their father or ElBr until they marry. Then they build a new compound, which Tauxier says is normally close to that of the Fa or ElBr; Mangin, however, reports that the new compound is often in another quarter of the village or even in another village (i.e., neolocal residence). When a householder dies, the heir (usually ElSo) leaves his own compound and moves into that of the deceased.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

Dim Delobsom says local exogamy prevails.

Known kinship is reported to be a bar to marriage. This would prevent unions with any first cousin. Second cousins likewise do not marry.

Patrilineal descent prevails. There are corporate, exogamous, totemic patrilineal kin groups (their type is not specified), each headed by its eldest male member (succession is by seniority).

Kinship Terminology (from Rattray)

Fa--ba. Mo--ma. ElBr--kyema. YoBr--yawa. Sibling of opposite sex-tawa. So--biga. Da--bi-pugela. Hu--sida. Wi--pava.

Avuncular and nepotic terms are basically bifurcate merging.

Cousin terms, as reported, are strictly descriptive, i.e., of Sudanese type; if this is correct, the social structure as a whole is Normal Sudanese.

Settlement Pattern

The typical Mossi settlement is a sprawling village, or perhaps more properly a neighborhood. Dwellings are grouped into compounds --five or six round huts with mud walls and conical thatched (with straw mats) roofs arranged in a circle with connecting mud walls to surround a courtyard (the huts do not have verandas). Compounds are separated from one another by about 40-50 yards (Mangin says 15-20 yards) with fields of maize between them. Each settlement is also divided into quarters, separated from one another by 200-500 yards. The section occupied by Fulani herdsmen has low conical shelters of straw.

Community Organization

There is no information on kin-group localization, but the quarters suggest localized lineages or clan-barrios and the report of local exogamy suggests clan-communities. Circumcision of boys and clitoridectomy of girls are both practiced at 8-12 years of age.

Local Government

Each settlement has a headman or "chef de la terre" (tengasoba), who controls the land but exercises little political authority; he is succeeded, according to Ruelle, by a son selected by the village elders; his functions are primarily ritual, though he administers justice with the help of a council of elders. Mangin reports that the office of local headman (possibly different from the above-mentioned "chef de la terre") is filled by appointment by the chief of the district, who is courted and bribed by competing candidates, never by a near kinsman

of the former headman. (Two distinct offices are common among the related Grunshi tribes). Dim Delobsom says the headman is succeeded by his ElSo. Each community also has a market supervisor. Each quarter of a village also has a head, who is succeeded by the eldest surviving family head in the quarter.

State

The Mossi are politically organized into three independent states--the main Mossi kingdom (with more than 2/3 of the total population), the state of Yatenga in the NW with its capital at Ouahigouya, and the state of Gurma in the E with its capital at Fada N'gourma. The large Mossi kingdom is divided into 9 provinces--five administrative provinces headed by the five great ministers (see below) and four vassal provinces with a considerable measure of autonomy (their heads are virtual monarchs in their domains). The provinces in turn are divided into districts, each comprising a number of settlements. District heads, who are often eunuchs appointed by the king, have non-hereditary speakers, are assisted by councils, and collect regular taxes and special imposts from the local headmen. At the head of the state stands the paramount chief or king, the Mogho-Naba, who maintains an elaborate court at the capital. He is assisted by five major ministers, who also serve as provincial governors. They are: (1) the Kamisoro, the prime minister and chief of the eunuchs (Mangin says he himself is one); (2) the Widi-Naba, who is chief of the cavalry and serves as ruler in the interregnum between the death of one king and the appointment of his successor; (3) the Larale, keeper of the royal tombs; (4) the Gunga-naba, chief of the infantry; and (5) the Ballum, chief of the pages and commandant of the palace. Other important officials include a military commander-in-chief, a leader of the royal bodyguard, a chief sacrificial priest, a chief of the royal servants, an official representative of the Yarse (a privileged trading caste of Mande origin), etc. There are also numerous eunuchs (only the king is privileged to have them), pages (young boys selected for their good looks; all chiefs have them), bodyguards, and royal wives (many of whom are established in scattered villages of eunuchs, who are responsible for their fidelity), etc. In addition to regular sources of revenue, the king has unlimited powers of confiscation. The death of a king is followed by an interregnum until the installation of his successor; this is a period of anarchy, with widespread pillage and even murder. The succession is determined by an electoral college consisting of the Widi-Naba (as president), the Larale, the

Gunga-naba, and the military commander-in-chief. This meets and makes its selection in secret, to avoid influence from rival candidates. The successor is apparently always a son. Ministers are also succeeded by a son--the ElSo or another selected by his Fa while alive.

Warfare

The state has always been secure. There is no intervillage warfare, and the Zaberma (Dyerma) who ravaged the Grunshi tribes between 1872 and 1897 left the Mossi severely alone. The excellent cavalry of the Mossi was an important factor in their conquests. The last war before the French occupation was with the Gurma state. Inferentially there is no cannibalism or headhunting.

Bibliography

Dim Delobsom, A. A. L'empire du Mogho-Naba: Coutumes des Mossi de la Haute-Volta. Etudes de Sociologie et d'Ethnologie Juridiques, XI, 1-308. Paris, 1933. (Very good).

Mangin, E. Les Mossi. Anthropos, IX, 98-124, 477-493, 705-736; X-XI, 187-217, 323-331. 1914-16. (Has considerable information).

_____. Les Mossi. Paris, 1921. Day-Missions. (Same as above, in book form).

Marc, L. A. Le pays Mossi. Paris, 1909. (Not consulted).

Rattray, R. S. Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland. 2 vols. Oxford, 1932. (Has kinship terminology only).

Ruelle, E. Notes anthropologiques, ethnographiques et sociologiques sur qualques populations noirs. L'Anthropologie, XV, 519-561, 657-703. 1904. (A few items).

Tauxier, L. Le noir du Soudan. Paris, 1912. (Sound and relatively complete except for kinship and kin groups).

_____. Le noir du Yatenga, pp. 1-524. Paris, 1917. (Excellent on the Mossi of the Yatenga kingdom).

_____. Nouvelles notes sur le Mossi et le Gourounsi. Paris, 1924. (Not consulted).

4: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1957
FA28 Mossi FA28

SECTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MOSSI PEOPLE*

By Elliott Percival Skinner**

Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York, N.Y.

121 The African Sudanic states were the subject of a discussion presented before The New York Academy of Sciences in 1949. At that time Joseph Greenberg discussed the rise of these states and evaluated the theories assigning the predominant part in their formation to Caucasian influences. However, the Negro genesis of the Mossi Sudanic state never has been seriously questioned.[1] In this paper I propose to analyze the political system of the Mossi in the light of such questions as: the power structure of the African state; the conquest theory of state formation; and the presence of feudalism or feudal-type states in the Sudan.

●105 The one and one-half million Mossi represent the largest population aggregate in what is now known as French West Africa. They inhabit an arid 125,000 square miles of sub-Saharan area drained by the Black, Red, and White Voltas and their tributaries. The Mossi are described physically as "true" Negroes as distinguished from the other Sudanic types. Their language belongs to the Mossi-Grunshi groups of the Niger-Congo family of African languages. In many respects their culture is similar to those of such Voltaic groups as the Tallensi, Dagomba, and Mamprussi peoples of the Northern Gold Coast (Ghana). The people in this Voltaic region are mainly agriculturalists who grow several varieties of millet and sorghum. They rear some cattle, sheep, and goats, but do little fishing or hunting. Their kinship systems are based on patrilineal segmented lineages. Throughout this entire region we find the institution of earth priests who are ritual owners of the land, but political organization is highly segmented and acephalous, with the exception of the centrally organized systems of the Dagomba, Mossi, and Mamprussi.

175 The *Tarikh es Soudan*, a chronicle written by Es Sadi, who lived in Timbuktu during the early seventeenth century, records that the Mossi first appeared on the historical scene about 1328. Between the years 1328 and 1477 the Mossi of the northern kingdom of Yatenga attacked and conquered Timbuktu, sacked Macina, and raided the towns of Bagana and Walata held by the Songhoi. In turn they were defeated by Sonni-Ali, the famous Songhoi ruler, who even invaded their territory, capturing slaves and booty. Askia El Hadj Mohamed, ruler of the Songhoi, raised a holy war

[122] *This paper, illustrated with lantern slides, was presented at a meeting of the Section on May 27, 1957. The field work on which it is based was conducted between November 1955 and January 1957 and was made possible by a fellowship of the Ford Foundation's African Studies Program, New York, N.Y.

**The author accepts sole responsibility for the contents of this paper.

8: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1958
FA28 Mossi FA28

Christianity and Islam among the Mossi[1]

ELLIOTT P. SKINNER
Columbia University

797 THE twin forces of Christianity and Islam are both seriously contending for the conversion of the pagan masses of the Western Sudan. Islam first penetrated this region during the 11th century and succeeded in converting many people to its faith. Christianity arrived on the scene only 60 years ago, and has not had the time to win many converts. However, there remained many societies in this area which were largely pagan until European conquests exposed them almost simultaneously to the influences of both Christianity and Islam. One such society, the Mossi, has been described as the principal island of resistance to Islam in the Sudan (Gouilly 1952:52). André (1924:31) states that the Mossi "offered to the Animists an irreducible rampart against the invasion of Islam." And Delafosse concurs that the Mossi "seem to have been particularly hostile to Islam which has made no progress among them since the Hegira. And although an appreciable number of Moslem strangers (Yarsé) lived among them, they have almost all remained pagans" (1912, vol. 3:187).

The first Christian Catholic missionaries arrived in Mossi territory in 1900, just four years after French conquest. These missionaries were kindly if fearfully received by the people, who gave them land for building a mission and for cultivating crops. The Mossi helped the Christians cultivate these crops and willingly allowed the children to attend the mission school. Nevertheless, when the missionaries tried to convert the children to Catholicism, the parents objected and withdrew the children from school (Socquet 1956:62). The Protestant American "Assemblies of God" mission first worked among the Mossi in 1926, and in 1931 they reported that the outlook for conversions was "hopeful" (Cooksey and McLeish 1931:215). But from 1926 to date, the Protestants have made negligible progress in their conversions. There are today about 155,000 Moslems, 26,000 Catholics, and 1,760 Protestants in a Mossi population of over 1,500,000. These figures attest to the fact that despite a long history of resistance to foreign religious systems, many Mossi are now abandoning their traditional religion. But the figures also show that while Islam is gaining many converts, the Catholics are making only slight progress, and the American Protestants hardly any at all. There are obviously many reasons for the differential advance of these three religious systems. In this paper I will examine and analyze the processes by which these religious systems attempt to gain converts, and delineate the reasons for their differential success.

173 105 [186] The Mossi who are now feeling the impact of external religious influences represent the unique example of a Sudanese group which has preserved its ethnic identity and political autonomy through all the vicissitudes of Sudanic history until French conquest in 1896. Tradition records that the first Mossi

8: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1958
FA28 Mossi FA28

rulers left the Dagomba region in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) during the 11th century and moved into the bend of the Niger River, carving out three large kingdoms and smaller principalities in the process. At the head of these still extant kingdoms are rulers (*Moro Nabas*, who hold feudal-like control of the provinces, districts, and villages which comprise their domains. A complex hierarchical administrative apparatus extends the power of the rulers into the smallest village, and funnels taxes and tribute back to them. French conquest modified this highly efficient system but did not greatly change it. The Mossi state apparatus rests on an economy which produces cotton cloth, horses, sheep, cattle, and goats, but the main support of this large population—one of the densest in the Sudan—is grain agriculture. Today, some Mossi districts still have as many as 70 persons per square mile.

The Mossi are divided into stratified royal, noble, and commoner patrilineages. Characteristic of this lineage system is a process by which royal sublineages descend serially until they merge with the mass of commoner lineages. Below the lineages there were once large non-Mossi groups of serfs and slaves, but these people have now been grouped into lineages and have become Mossi. Patrilocal polygynous extended family households, grouped into villages, form the basic Mossi settlement pattern. Marriages are arranged between unrelated persons through the agency of lineage members who establish "friendly" relationships. The two friends might ask their lineage heads for women to exchange as wives, or the "friend" who has received more gifts from his opposite number will give over a wife. Because only the older men have women and goods at their disposal, they are usually the ones who receive wives. The result is that most young men have no wives and must content themselves with occasional lovers until they inherit wives from lineage members. The Mossi have a great fear of incestuous relations which bring down the wrath of the ancestors (the *Keemsé*).

Ancestor veneration is at the core of Mossi religious behavior. The recent ancestors are notified, through sacrifices, of the important events in the lives of their descendants, and they are expected to aid in solving everyday problems. The ancestors also invoke their sanctions against antisocial behavior among their descendants. Once a year the Mossi people, in concert with the Moro Nabas, appeal to their individual and collective ancestors for good crops, large families, and for the preservation of the dynasty. Often associated with the ancestors as propitiatory agents are local deities called *Tengkougas* (sing. *Tenkougre*) or earth shrines, visibly manifested by clumps of trees, mountains, rocks, or rivers. *Tengsobas* or earth priests appeal to the Tengkougas on behalf of the local populations for help in sickness, for rain and good crops, and for children. When proper sacrifices are offered to the Tengkougas, their spiritual agents, called *kinkirsé*, enter the wombs of women and are born as children. Twins and children who die young are regarded as "evil" kinkirsé who entered a woman without being invited. Nevertheless, many persons consider twins as special gifts to parents in favor of the earth deities.

The earth itself, *Tenga*, is one of the principal deities of the Mossi. Tenga is

9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

during a period of transition to effective independence.

The Mossi have the unique distinction of having preserved their ethnic identity and political autonomy throughout all the vicissitudes of Sudanese history until conquered by the French on September 1, 1896. The origin of Mossi society is couched in mythological terms. According to their tradition they came from Dagomba in the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) sometime during the 11th or 12th century and moved northward towards the Niger River. During this migration they carved out three large kingdoms and many small principalities by conquering and absorbing some of the indigenous Ninisi and Foulse and Dogon populations, and by chasing the others into the cliffs of Bandiagara. In 1328, according to Es Sadi in the *Tarikh es Soudan*, the Mossi attacked, burned, and sacked Timbuktu, then held by Mali, and during the following century attacked Walata and Banku. They received their first setback by the Ali, and were severely beaten by Askia the Great, the usurper of the Songhoi throne, who lead a *jihad* against them in 1499. But their attacks into the Niger bend did not cease until the Moroccans became masters of Timbuktu sometime in the early 1590's. From that period until the French conquest, the Mossi remained relatively quiescent. They developed and maintained an economy based on grain cultivation, livestock rearing, cotton production, and trade between the forest zones and the desert. Their political system crystallized into a loose confederacy of fairly autonomous kingdoms and principalities, sometimes tribute to the Moro Naba, the ruler of Wagadougou.

Wagadougou, the most important Mossi political entity, was like the lesser kingdoms, pyramidal in political structure. At the top was and still is the Moro Naba, a lineal descendant of Wedraogo, the Dagomba conquerer who founded the Mossi group and Moro Naba Wubri, the first ruler of the Wagadougou dynasty. Paying allegiance to him, were the princes who ruled such autonomous provinces as Yako, Boulsa, Mane, Riziam, and Boussouma. These princes were all sons or near relatives of the early Moro Nabas. Directly under the Moro Naba were district chiefs who were descended from the cadet branches of the ruling family. The villages within the district were in turn ruled by the chiefs of the indigenous populations. In many of the villages,

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
FA28 Mossi FA28

[p. 237]

CHAPTER 9

Trade and Markets Among the Mossi People

BY ELLIOTT P. SKINNER

The Mossi represent the dominant population of the Voltaic Republic, numbering about 1,600,000 out of some 3,200,000 inhabitants. They represent the unique example of a group which has preserved its ethnic identity and political autonomy through all the vicissitudes of Sudanic history until it was conquered by the French in 1896. Tradition records that the people who became the Mossi left the Dagomba region in present-day Ghana during the eleventh century and moved into the bend of the Niger River, carving out three large kingdoms and smaller principalities in the process. At the head of these still extant kingdoms are rulers *(Moro Nabas)* who formerly held feudal-like control over the provinces, districts and villages which comprise their domains. The villages, with their patri-local, polygynous, extended family households, formed the basic Mossi settlement pattern. A complex hierarchical administrative apparatus carried the power of the Mossi rulers into the smallest villages, and funneled taxes and tribute back to them. This structure still exists, but of course it has been modified by the French.

The Mossi were and are still divided into stratified royal, noble and commoner patrilineages. Characteristic of this lineage system is a process by which royal sub-lineages descend serially until they merge with the mass of commoner lineages. Below the lineages there once were large non-Mossi groups of serfs and slaves, but these people have now been grouped into lineages and have become Mossicized.

The topography of Mossi country is typical of the Sudanic grasslands. It is an immense plain, some 1,500 feet above sea level and broken only by three low mountain ranges and numerous small hills. The annual total rainfall is between 30 and 40 inches, and falls almost entirely as heavy showers or thundershowers during the period from June to September. So narrow is the margin of rainfall for successful crop cultivation that any variation in the cycle results in low crop yields and a difficult "hungry period" the following year before the new crops are harvested. The Mossi do not practice irrigation, and would have trouble doing so because the three Volta Rivers which drain their territory serve as drainage chiefly during the rainy season. Only the Black Volta has water all year round; the